

Intro

Overview The year 1968 witnessed a wave of protests, uprisings, and movements across the globe. These revolutions were driven by diverse grievances but shared common themes of opposition to authority, demand for rights, and a desire for social change.

The movements were largely led by students, workers, and marginalized groups, and they challenged political, social, and cultural norms.

Global Context The 1960s were a period of rapid social change, marked by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the decolonization of Africa and Asia, and the growing opposition to the Vietnam War.

The Cold War, with its ideological battle between capitalism and communism, also influenced the revolutions, as did the broader cultural shifts of the decade, including the rise of counterculture and the questioning of traditional values.

Causes and Motivations

Political and Economic Discontent **Authoritarianism:** In many countries, the revolutions were a reaction against authoritarian regimes or governments perceived as corrupt, repressive, or unresponsive to the needs of the people.

Economic Inequality: Economic grievances, including rising unemployment, inflation, and inequality, fueled dissatisfaction, particularly among young people and workers.

Opposition to the Vietnam War: In the United States and Western Europe, the anti-war movement played a crucial role in galvanizing protests, with the Vietnam War seen as an unjust conflict.

Causes and Motivations (cont)

Social and Cultural Factors **Youth and Student Movements:** A significant demographic shift, with a large youth population, led to an energized student movement. Students demanded more rights, freedom of expression, and changes in the educational system.

Cultural Revolution and Counterculture: The 1960s counterculture, characterized by a rejection of traditional norms, the rise of new forms of music and art, and a push for sexual liberation, influenced the revolutionary fervor.

Civil Rights and Liberation Movements: Movements for civil rights, women's rights, and liberation of oppressed groups (such as the Black Power movement and feminist movements) were integral to the broader revolutionary wave.



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Key Events and Movements in 1968

The United States **Civil Rights Movement:** The struggle for civil rights intensified in 1968, with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4 leading to widespread riots and protests across the country.

Anti-Vietnam War Protests: Protests against the Vietnam War escalated, particularly after the Tet Offensive in January 1968. The Democratic National Convention in Chicago in August saw violent clashes between protesters and police.

Key Events and Movements in 1968 (cont)

Columbia University Protests: In April 1968, students at Columbia University in New York City occupied campus buildings, protesting the university's ties to military research and its plans to build a gym in a Harlem park. The protests ended with police forcibly removing the students.

France – May 1968 **Student Protests:** The French May began with student protests against outdated university conditions, restrictions on freedom of expression, and the authoritarianism of the French government under President Charles de Gaulle.

Key Events and Movements in 1968 (cont)

Workers' Strikes: The student protests quickly escalated into a general strike involving over 10 million workers, paralyzing the country. Workers demanded better wages, working conditions, and greater participation in decision-making.

Government Response and Outcome: The French government eventually negotiated with the unions, offering concessions on wages and working conditions. However, the movement led to a temporary political crisis and a questioning of de Gaulle's leadership, though he survived a referendum later that year.



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Key Events and Movements in 1968 (cont)

Czechoslovakia – Prague Spring **Reform Movement:** The Prague Spring was a period of political liberalization in Czechoslovakia under the leadership of Alexander Dubček, who sought to create "socialism with a human face." Reforms included freedom of the press, speech, and movement, as well as economic and political decentralization.

Soviet Invasion: The Warsaw Pact, led by the Soviet Union, invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968 to crush the reform movement, fearing it would spread to other Eastern Bloc countries. The invasion ended the Prague Spring and reasserted Soviet control, but it also inspired future movements for freedom and reform in Eastern Europe.

Key Events and Movements in 1968 (cont)

Mexico – Tlatelolco Massacre **Student Protests:** In Mexico, students began protesting against government repression, demanding political freedoms, and criticizing the authoritarian rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Government Crackdown: The protests culminated in the Tlatelolco Massacre on October 2, 1968, when Mexican security forces opened fire on a peaceful student demonstration in Mexico City, killing hundreds. The massacre occurred just days before the start of the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, drawing international condemnation and marking a significant moment in Mexican history.

Key Events and Movements in 1968 (cont)

Germany – West Germany's 1968 Movement **Student Protests:** In West Germany, the student movement was driven by opposition to the Vietnam War, the lingering influence of former Nazis in positions of power, and calls for educational reform and greater political freedoms.

Rudi Dutschke and the SDS: Rudi Dutschke, a prominent student leader, became a symbol of the German student movement, which was spearheaded by the Socialist German Student Union (SDS).

Impact on Society: The movement led to significant cultural and political shifts in West Germany, contributing to the rise of new social movements and the questioning of the country's post-war order.



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Key Events and Movements in 1968 (cont)

Italy – The Hot Autumn – **Worker and Student Protests:** In Italy, the "Hot Autumn" of 1969 (closely connected to the events of 1968) saw widespread strikes and factory occupations by workers demanding better wages and working conditions, alongside student protests for educational reform.

Social Movements: The Italian protests were characterized by a collaboration between students and workers, challenging both the government and traditional trade unions.

Long-Term Effects: The movements of 1968-1969 in Italy laid the groundwork for the rise of left-wing terrorism in the 1970s and significant social and political changes in the country.

Outcomes and Legacy

Short-Term Outcomes – **Repression and Reform:** In many cases, governments responded to the revolutions with repression, as seen in Mexico, Czechoslovakia, and parts of Western Europe. However, some movements led to reforms, particularly in areas such as education, labor rights, and civil liberties.

Long-Term Impact – **Cultural and Social Change:** The 1968 revolutions had a profound impact on culture, contributing to the rise of new social norms, the empowerment of marginalized groups, and the spread of feminist, environmental, and other progressive movements.

Political Impact: The revolutions influenced future political developments, including the rise of New Left movements, the questioning of traditional authority, and changes in governance in many countries.

Outcomes and Legacy (cont)

Global Influence: The events of 1968 inspired future generations of activists and remain a symbol of the struggle for justice, equality, and human rights. The year is often remembered as a turning point in the 20th century, signaling the end of post-war consensus and the beginning of a more pluralistic and contested political landscape.

Conclusion

Assessment: The 1968 revolutions were a global phenomenon, marked by a shared desire for change but manifesting in different ways depending on the local context. While not all the movements achieved their immediate goals, they left a lasting legacy of questioning authority and striving for a more just society.

Reflection: The year 1968 continues to be a touchstone for understanding social movements, the power of youth activism, and the dynamics of political change.



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